Salvation Is Necessary

Acts of the Apostles

February 28, 2021

Christianity is a religion of salvation. The Bible, which forms its foundation, is also a book of salvation. Christianity teaches that humanity needs salvation, and it shows what people must do in order to be saved. The essence of its teaching is drawn from the Bible. Interpretations may differ slightly, depending on how Scripture is understood, but all orthodox Christianity proclaims salvation.

Today, I would like us to study this salvation more deeply, so that our hearts may be filled with greater gratitude to God.

I. Deliverance from the Dominion of the Devil

The central theme most emphasized by Christ was the reign of God. In translation, this is usually rendered as "the Kingdom of God," but its true meaning is "the rule of God." Opposed to the rule of God is the "rule of the devil." Christ described the world under this rule as "this world" or "this present age." He taught that the world we now live in is under the dominion of the devil.

What Christ proclaimed was that into this devil-ruled world, the reign of God would be established. In the end, the rule of God will completely overthrow the devil's dominion, and God's kingdom will be established according to His will. Humanity will then be invited into that kingdom, into the realm of God's reign.

This work of establishing God's kingdom can be considered in three dimensions: the salvation of humanity, the salvation of the natural world (which includes the environment in which humanity lives), and humanity's ultimate salvation.

II. The Salvation of Humanity

Why do humans need salvation? Because we live under the shadow of sickness and death, constantly tormented by the fear these realities bring. No matter how advanced science becomes, no matter how much medicine progresses, these fears can never be escaped.

In addition, people are surrounded by countless insoluble and deeply troubling problems. Inequalities of wealth, race, culture, gender, and ability—all these differences become not just distinctions but disparities, and from disparities they become discrimination that causes suffering.

The problems of population, particularly the explosive growth of the poor in developing nations, along with shortages of food, depletion of energy, environmental pollution, global warming, and climate change—these are rapidly pushing humanity toward the limit, yet solutions remain elusive. The world is increasingly likely to fall into confusion and decline.

Over the past year, the COVID-19 pandemic has covered the globe with fear, causing economic disruption and political instability. The isolation of the infected has shaken the very foundations of human society, destroying family life and leaving irreparable damage. Compared with the Spanish Flu or the medieval Black Death, COVID-19 is not severe. And yet it has exposed the fragility of our social structures. We must assume that even more devastating plagues could still arise.

As the living environment worsens, human hearts deteriorate as well. Love grows cold. Interest in social life weakens. Individualism and selfishness increase. Under the name of "human rights," people demand their own way, losing the ability to forgive, losing patience and tolerance. The problems surrounding LGBT identity intensify without limit, making ordinary social life more difficult. Society more and more takes on the form of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Added to all this is the problem of war. The optimism that science and reason would bring world peace has proven false. The 20th century saw more deaths by war than any other century in history, and the 21st may surpass it.

Humanity has fought against these problems and will continue to struggle. But human strength has its limits. Without salvation that comes from beyond human hands, there is no future for mankind. True salvation is to be invited into God's kingdom, rescued from this present world, and granted eternal life.

III. The Salvation of the Natural World

The natural world in which we live has also fallen under the devil's rule. The beautiful, harmonious creation of God has lost its order, become twisted, and suffered destruction. Natural disasters strike repeatedly.

On a global scale, catastrophic disasters remain possible. Mantle shifts could trigger crustal movements, bringing earthquakes and volcanic eruptions beyond human control. (Though recent science tends to deny mantle-shift theories.) Japan is especially earthquake-prone, and it has long been warned that urban quakes as severe as the Great Kanto Earthquake may occur. The Tokai region, Shikoku, the eastern coast of Kyushu, the Amami Islands, and the Pacific coasts of Tohoku and Hokkaido could all be struck at any time. Death tolls in the hundreds of thousands or even millions are predicted. Other regions of the world face similar risks.

Nor is the threat limited to Earth itself. We live in a cosmic environment. Humanity has no defense against cosmic threats. Even a small asteroid or fragment of solar-system debris could wipe us out, as it is believed to have done with the dinosaurs. Jesus Himself foretold celestial upheavals—the sun darkening and stars falling from the sky.

Paul prophesied that nature itself is included in God's redemption, destined to be set free and made complete. John taught that this world will be destroyed by God's hand and a new heaven and a new earth created. How far that new creation will extend, we do not know. But the natural world will be remade.

Human salvation means being delivered from this world and remade anew. Scripture speaks of this as being "made new." The salvation of nature, however, involves complete destruction and re-creation. Human salvation cannot be perfected without the salvation of the natural world in which we live.

IV. Ultimate Salvation

Picture the original state of humanity and nature in Eden before the Fall. There was a flawless, unblemished humanity living in perfect harmony with creation. Yet more than that, there was unhindered fellowship with God.

Created in God’s image, human beings were endowed with the capacity to converse with God and share their hearts with Him. This was the pinnacle of our spiritual nature. Human joy and happiness were not simply eating well, loving one another, forming families, building communities, and living surrounded by nature’s abundance. Rather, true joy was found in communion with God. Without this spiritual dimension, salvation would never be complete.

Today, in our Christian lives, we worship, give thanks, and pray. But all these are hindered and imperfect in this world. For that reason, God has given special gifts: prayer in tongues and speech to God in tongues, as a means of unhindered communion with Him.

As a Pentecostal church, we are part of the largest and fastest-growing Christian movement in the world. We believe that speaking in tongues is the evidence of receiving the baptism in the Holy Spirit. At times, in emphasizing the baptism of the Spirit, some have downplayed the importance of tongues.

But from my understanding of Scripture, tongues are themselves a gift of grace—a way to transcend the limits of human language and the stumbling blocks of human emotion, enabling free and full expression of the heart. Those who experience this grace enter into such deep communion with God that they may break into song, weep, laugh, roll on the ground, or run with joy—just as described in Acts 2.

Those who have tasted this grace are so moved by the presence of God that they proclaim the gospel boldly. As Paul taught, this blessing is prepared for all believers. May our churches also seek this blessing with earnest prayer.

Still, tongues are a gift for this imperfect world. Eternal life will be the perfect fulfillment—where every believer will freely and fully commune with God, praising Him

without hindrance, finding infinite and supreme joy in His presence. Salvation is eternal salvation. And this eternity is not only endless in time but also immeasurable in its quality.